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Near East

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Sympathetic and Impartial Friendship

*A Formula for
Peace in the Middle East*

An Address by

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The views expressed in this address are those of Dr. Van Kirk and, except where otherwise indicated, are not to be regarded as necessarily reflecting the views of the National Council of Churches.

THE shadows of tension and disorder deepen in the Middle East. Whatever hopes there may have been that the partition of Palestine would create in this area conditions of political and economic stability, they have proved illusory. There has been an Arab-Israeli war, followed by an uneasy truce, and many years of futile negotiations looking toward a permanent settlement. The boundary lines fixed in the Assembly chamber of the United Nations have been changed by the arbitrament of war. Along these unstable borders have occurred incidents of such violence as to shock the conscience of mankind. The lot of the Palestinian refugee has steadily worsened. Arab distrust of the UN, and more particularly of the United States, has engendered throughout this entire area a mood of hostility and despair.

A Re-examination of United States Policy

There was a time when the United States had the confidence and goodwill of the Arab world. At that time we were believed to be a people bent upon securing the rights of all men in a world of peace and justice. But not today. Where once there was a high regard for the United States there is now a sullen contempt and a deep hatred that is positively alarming. The Soviet Union, ever eager to exploit to its own advantage conditions such as these, has increased its propaganda pressures to the point where peace and security in the Middle East are gravely menaced.

Keenly aware of the explosive potentials of this situation, and knowing full well that a new clash of arms in the Middle East could mean disaster for the American people, the United States appears to have undertaken a re-examination of its policies and procedures respecting this area. This re-examination, as

I understand it, does not suggest a diminishing interest by the United States with respect to Israel or the Arab States. It does suggest, I believe, a determination that United States foreign policy respecting the Middle East shall be governed hereafter by considerations of "sympathetic and impartial friendship." These words, "sympathetic and impartial friendship" are not my words. They are the words of the President of the United States. Standing before a joint session of Congress, and with the eyes of millions of Americans focused upon him by the magic of television, the President, in his State of the Union Message, said: "In the Middle East, where tensions and serious problems exist, we will show sympathetic and impartial friendship."

Earlier, in May 1953, Secretary Dulles had visited this area, the first such visit to that part of the world by an American Secretary of State. In the light of what we now know it would appear that one of the major purposes to be served by this visitation was that of creating an atmosphere of "sympathetic and impartial friendship." Confirmation of this reorientation of American policy vis-a-vis the Middle East was provided by Senator Alexander Wiley, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In an address before the American Friends of the Middle East (January 29, 1954) he cautioned against a "pro-Arab" or "pro-Israel" approach to the baffling problems of this area. "Too many Americans," said Senator Wiley, "have made a great mistake in thinking of our Middle Eastern policies in 'pro-Arab' or 'pro-Israel' terms." "There is" he said, "no surer way to disaster than to try to take sides in such a situation."

All of which underscores the importance of the observation of the Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (July 24, 1953)

that: "The United States does not wish to see the internal order and the independence of the countries of the Near East threatened by economic chaos, Communist penetration, or military hostilities. Disorder with a resultant possibility of the renewal of hostilities in this part of the world would threaten the security interests of the United States and the free world generally."

In President Eisenhower's policy of "sympathetic and impartial friendship" there is seen the kind of statesmanship required to safeguard for the free world the connecting bridge between the East and the West. It must be crystal clear to all who have eyes to see that there is not enough money in our national treasury to buy security in the Middle East. Nor is security to be achieved by unilateral military assistance from the United States. As a matter of fact, American influence in this area can do little to achieve security if the feeling prevails, which rightly or wrongly, has prevailed throughout the Arab world, that Israel has been regarded by the United States with a special kind of political and economic affection. Nor could security in the Middle East be achieved if it were believed in Israel that the United States was playing favorites with the Arabs to the hurt of the Jews. To play political favorites in the Middle East is an exceedingly dangerous business, and one for which the American people have no taste whatsoever.

The reconciling influences suggested by a resolutely implemented policy of "sympathetic and impartial friendship" could make the difference between peace and war in the Middle East. Political decisions designed to resolve the tensions currently prevailing between Israel and the Arab States will prove abortive unless these decisions are imbued with the spirit of justice and mutuality. International disorder in this area can be moderated only

in part by political pacts. The hatred from which that disorder is derived can be abated only as it is brought under the influence of the kind of policy proposed by the President of the United States. But more than words are required. The concept of "sympathetic and impartial friendship" must now be made manifest in the behavior of the American people.

Economic Aid for the Middle East

What does such a concept mean for the United States in terms of economic aid for the Middle East? I refer here to governmental aid, not to the aid made available from private sources. The generous response of American Jewry to the needs of the Israeli people is unparalleled. Year after year, the Jews of the United States have contributed millions of dollars to strengthen the economy of Israel, and to provide food, shelter, and clothing for those pilgrims of the storm who had sought refuge in the "homeland" of their dreams. Could this record of sharing be matched by all people on every front of the world's need, many of the cares and anxieties of which mortals are possessed would tend to disappear.

When it comes to governmental aid, however, a policy of "sympathetic and impartial friendship" would seem to suggest that American dollars be allocated on a regional basis and in relation to established needs. It may be that in certain areas of the Middle East economic aid from the United States is more welcome than in other areas; that in one area conditions exist which offer greater promise of creative results than in other areas. These conditions cannot and should not be ignored. It must also be said that impartiality in economic aid cannot be achieved by an exer-

cise in arithmetic. To say that 50 per cent of such aid shall be given to one group, and 50 per cent to another group, without regard to the numbers of people involved, or to the acuteness and urgency of the need which such aid is designed to meet, is to ignore the demands of justice. Human needs cannot be measured by a mathematical calculation arbitrarily determined to give the appearance of impartiality.

I would expect, therefore, that when the question of American economic aid to the Middle East comes before the Congress, decisions will be reached not with the view to a slide-rule balancing of political pressures on the home front, but with a view to establishing in this entire region a healthy and viable economy such as will enrich the lives of all without regard to national boundaries; an economy that will also have consequences of lasting benefit to the United States and the free world.

I would expect also that, whenever possible, American economic aid and technical assistance would be made available to the Middle East under the aegis of the United Nations. The peoples of this area, striving for emancipation from the political and economic dominance of the West, are understandably suspicious of such aid when, as in the case of our Point Four program, this aid, rightly or wrongly, is believed to be related to American tactics in the cold war between East and West. If, however, the UN, with the full co-operation and encouragement of the United States, were to launch a more extensive program of economic and technical assistance in this area, a program that would be utterly free of implications of power politics, or of racial or cultural favoritism, or of consolidating the economic forces of one group to the disadvantage of other groups, a new day of promise might well dawn for Arabs and Israelis alike.

The UN, in 1949, established an Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East under the direction of Mr. Gordon Clapp, chairman of the Board of the Tennessee Valley Authority. For a variety of reasons, political and otherwise, little progress has been made in initiating, to say nothing of bringing to completion, the many projects of economic rehabilitation envisaged in the report of this Mission. Accordingly, the tendency has been to substitute, in this area, unilateral as over against multilateral aid. The results have been far from reassuring. It would seem to be the part of political wisdom, therefore, and in harmony with the concept of "sympathetic and impartial friendship," for the United States to channel a larger part of its economic aid and technical assistance for this area through the United Nations.

While the UN, under its Charter, is precluded from interfering in matters deemed by member states to be of "domestic concern," it will be recalled that the General Assembly has affirmed certain broad principles related to land reform. These principles are relevant to such issues as improving the lot of landless peasants, providing security of tenure, and preventing exorbitant rentals. If economic aid for the Middle East, through the UN, were to be projected upon the background and in the spirit of the General Assembly's concerns for land reform, certain social gains might be achieved which would invalidate, at least in part, the oft-heard criticism that economic aid and technical assistance have the effect of making the rich richer, and the poor poorer. Economic cohesion in that part of the Middle East embracing Israel and the Arab States is not likely to be achieved by the unilateral action of the United States. But the UN can labor, with greater expectation of ultimate success, for a unified economy in this area through such projects as the development of the Jordan River Valley.

Military Assistance to the Middle East

What does the President's declaration of policy mean for the United States in terms of military assistance for the Middle East? It is doubtful that much of enduring value is achieved when the United States offers military assistance first to one, and then to another, and yet to another of the nations in this area. The jealousies and suspicions aroused by this fragmentary and hit-or-miss method of scattering guns and bayonets, first here, and then there, is likely to more than offset any gains that might be achieved by such methods. When Arabs resort to inflammatory demagoguery about pushing the Jews into the sea, it is little wonder that the Israeli Government should display anxiety whenever it is proposed that American arms be sent to the Arab world. Conversely, the Arabs, convinced that Israel will seek to expand its territory by aggressive tactics of one kind or another, are understandably alarmed when it is proposed that American arms be sent to that country. Whether or not these fears, on either the Israeli or the Arab side, are warranted, there they are, and no amount of political pontification to the contrary can remove them.

It seems clear, therefore, that until such time as the UN is prepared and able fully to discharge its Charter commitments respecting collective security, the United States, despite past frustrations, should persist in its effort to achieve for the Middle East a mutual defense pact which would guarantee the Arabs against Israeli aggression, and the Israelis against Arab aggression, and both Arabs and Israelis against Soviet aggression. Once the Arabs are convinced that the United States is not playing favorites in the Middle East, one of the major factors thus far block-

ing the way toward achieving a co-ordinated military strategy for this entire area will have been removed.

A Re-examination of United States — United Nations Policy

What does the concept of "sympathetic and impartial friendship," respecting the Middle East mean for the United States in terms of our participation in the United Nations? It means that our government will continue to press for a solution of the Israeli-Arab issues within the framework of the United Nations. When the UN, with the vigorous support of the United States, partitioned Palestine, the world community assumed a moral obligation to promote in that crucial area such conditions of political and economic justice as would enhance the peace of mankind. If it is true, as stated by Secretary Dulles, that the Middle East is "a bridge between Europe, Asia, and Africa," then what transpires on that bridge is of vital concern not only to Arabs, and Israelis, and the American people, but to the peoples of the whole world.

I would expect, therefore, that in whatever ways may be open to it, the United States will seek, in and through the UN, to discover areas of agreement which will ease existing tensions and prepare the way for a settlement acceptable to Israel and the Arab States. Such a settlement will require bold and imaginative decisions, and a determination to lay aside the pride and prejudice occasioned by six years of debate, in a persistent and dedicated search for an order of life in the Middle East that will benefit not only the peoples of this area, but free people everywhere.

During the past six years the UN has dealt with the Middle East in a piecemeal fashion. It partitioned Palestine. Then, in order to

meet the problems related to the outbreak of hostilities, the UN set up the Palestine Conciliation Commission. Therefore, there was established a Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine. When it became evident that the problem of the Arab refugees would not be quickly solved, there was instituted a Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. There has been some overlapping of the functions of these various Commissions and Agencies. Too often these bodies have operated within the limited framework of the specific responsibilities assigned to them and with too little effort to achieve a comprehensive co-ordination of policy and program. This situation could lead and, in fact, has led to much confusion and frustration. Not one of the many issues in dispute between Israel and the Arabs can be settled apart from an over-all solution.

The relief problem is related to political issues. The military problem is related to boundary lines. These, in turn, are related to political considerations. The status of Jerusalem involves all of these factors, plus certain cultural and religious equations; and economic stability for Israel and the Arab States cannot be achieved apart from a trustworthy political settlement. Moreover, time marches on, and earth-shaking developments have taken place in the Middle East that could not possibly have been foreseen by the General Assembly in 1947. So the operations of the UN vis-a-vis this area tend to be circumscribed by decisions which, in certain respects, are no longer relevant to the dynamic and highly volatile issues by which peace is imperiled in 1954.

That is why it is so imperative that a fresh start be made by the UN to achieve peace and security in the Middle East. I suggest that the U. S. Mission to the UN initiate conversations with representatives of the nations

directly concerned, to determine whether or not the re-examination of American policy now under way, respecting the Middle East, points toward a possible re-examination of policy by the UN. Once it were convincingly established that the United States is not playing favorites in that part of the world the UN might be in a more advantageous position to exercise its good offices in an effort to break the present deadlock. If the UN were to re-examine its policies respecting the Middle East in the spirit of "sympathetic and impartial friendship" it might then be possible to lift the Israeli-Arab dispute to the higher levels of reason and responsible statesmanship.

Were this to happen, a new and more promising approach might be made to such issues as the repatriation and resettlement of refugees, compensation for abandoned properties, the status of Jerusalem, and the fixing of boundary lines. The General Assembly could then engage in a process of searching interrogation respecting these controversial issues.

Is it in the interest of justice and fair play that such of the refugees as wish to do so shall be accorded the right to return to their former homes? If the answer was 'No,' the General Assembly could reconsider its earlier recommendation that these refugees be accorded this right. If the answer was 'Yes,' the General Assembly could, and should reaffirm its recommendation in this respect.

Is it in the interest of justice and fair play that refugees be compensated for their abandoned properties? Since it is generally conceded that compensation should be paid, the General Assembly might consider the wisdom of creating a United Nations Claims Commission to facilitate such compensation.

Is it in the interest of justice and fair play that some form of international arrangement

be negotiated that will vouchsafe to Jews, Muslims, and Christians the rights which are theirs respecting Jerusalem? If the answer was 'No,' the UN could reconsider its recommendation respecting the internationalization of Jerusalem. If the answer was 'Yes,' the General Assembly could, and should say so and initiate a new effort toward this end.

Is it in the interest of justice and fair play that Israeli-Arab boundary lines fixed by war and its aftermath be invested with the moral sanction of the United Nations? If the answer was 'Yes,' the General Assembly could say so, and reconsider its earlier action respecting boundary lines. If the answer was 'No,' the General Assembly could either reaffirm its earlier recommendations, or seek an acceptable compromise which would take into account the realities of the existing situation.

Moreover, when the General Assembly comes to grips with issues such as these, a representative of the Palestinian refugees should be accorded the right to participate in the debate. These refugees have a culture of their own, and a history, and a heritage, and it may be questioned whether their case can be put before the UN with sufficient urgency by anyone not of their own choosing.

I am convinced that, as things now stand, the UN will continue to experience frustration in the effort to resolve Israeli-Arab tensions. If, on the other hand, the United States Mission to the UN were to request that body to undertake a re-examination of its recommendations respecting this area in the spirit of President Eisenhower's policy of "sympathetic and impartial friendship," an appreciable advance might be made toward the goal of peace and security in the Middle East.

I come now to two of the issues in which Christians have a special interest, and concerning which the National Council of

Churches has spoken its mind: the problem of the Arab refugees and the status of Jerusalem.

The Christian Concern for Refugees

The Christian community of the entire world, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, has been and is vitally interested in the 872,000 Palestinian refugees. And let it never be said that those Christians who have lifted their voices in behalf of these refugees are, or have ever been, unmindful of the needs of Jewish refugees. I recall with what unanimity the whole of Christendom manifested its concern for the many thousands of persecuted Jews who were transported to Buchenwald and other torture chambers by the Hitlers and the Goebbels. More recently, when vast numbers of Jews living in Soviet-dominated lands were singled out for persecution, and deported from the land of their fathers, Christians spoke out against the madness of this tyranny. The National Council of Churches characterized these purges as an offense to God, and called upon Christians everywhere to register their condemnation of these assaults upon the Jewish community. I myself represented the National Council of Churches in a gigantic rally in New York, sponsored jointly by 31 national Jewish organizations, and there lifted my voice in a common prayer to Almighty God that the hand of the oppressor might be stayed. Nor is there lacking a Christian concern for those Jewish refugees from Arab lands who, upon their arrival in Israel, were received with an outpouring of affection and generosity such as the world has seldom seen.

It is upon this background of the total concern of Christians for all refugees, of whatever race, religion, or nationality, that the inter-

est manifested by the National Council of Churches for the Arab refugees can best be understood. It will be recalled that in May, 1951, there was convened in Beirut, Lebanon, under the auspices of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, a Conference on Arab Refugee Problems. The fifty delegates, of whom I was one, were drawn from the Protestant and Orthodox churches of many countries. Prior to the convening of the Conference, visits were made to some of the refugee camps. I visited a number of such camps in Jordan, all the way from the Old Jerusalem area to Amman. This was for me a pilgrimage of sorrow. Seldom have I been so deeply stirred. Nor were my emotions of Christian compassion in any measure diminished by the controversy then raging as to who was responsible for this human suffering.

I have listened to prolonged debates as to whose fault it was that these Palestinian refugees are now living in caves and make-shift camps in the desert. I have heard Israeli sympathizers say the plight of these refugees is directly attributable to Arab aggression and to the siren voice of Arab leaders bent upon feathering their own political nests. I have heard Arab sympathizers say the plight of these refugees resulted from fear-provoking incidents and campaigns of terror inspired by the Israelis for the purpose of forcing the Palestinian Arabs to leave their homes and their lands. I, for one, do not possess the knowledge that would be required to express an errorless judgment on this controversial issue.

In any event, and for whatever reasons, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees are at this very hour, five and a half years after they entered their camps and caves, enduring unspeakable deprivation. It is not in harmony with the New Testament concept

of charity for Christians to stand knee deep in the tears of anguished refugees and there debate the pros and cons of the political circumstances related to their plight. Certainly I could not find it in my heart to do this. Nor could those churchmen who participated in the Beirut Conference. Here were suffering, want, and despair on a scale that taxed to the utmost every impulse of Christian mercy. As I traveled the Jericho Road, with mile upon mile of refugee camps on either side, I was reminded anew of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and of the compassion and tenderness of heart manifested without regard to the circumstances related to the plight of the hapless wayfarer who had fallen among thieves.

It was in this spirit that the Beirut Conference, in its official Statement, declared that any over-all settlement of the many-sided Israeli-Arab dispute would "have to contain provision for the return of a certain number of refugees to their original homes." This statement, as previously indicated, was reminiscent of an action solemnly affirmed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on December 11, 1948. In this action the United Nations resolved "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date. . . ." And Secretary Dulles, last June, in reporting to the American people on his visit to the Middle East, declared: "Some of these refugees could be settled in the area presently controlled by Israel." The General Board of the National Council of Churches, on September 17, 1953, in a communication addressed to the members of the United States delegation to the Eighth General Assembly of the United Nations, associated itself, in principle, with this declaration of Mr. Dulles.

It is not now believed that all of the 872,000 Arab refugees could or would desire to be

repatriated. But surely Christians have ample justification for believing, as the Beirut Conference observed, that "the greater proportion of the Palestinian refugees are the victims of a catastrophe for which they themselves are not responsible. A deep injustice has been inflicted upon them, a measure of suffering they never deserved. To them is owed a debt of restitution by their fellow men, especially by those who in any way shared in the responsibility for their present plight." While recognizing the basic right of all refugees to their own homes and property, the churchmen assembled at Beirut said in utter frankness that many Palestinian refugees would have to settle in new homes. They petitioned the United Nations to increase and expand its program of relief and resettlement. They pleaded with Christians everywhere to join in a ministry of Good Samaritan mercy for the sake of the wayfaring refugees on the Jericho roads of the Middle East. I do not myself believe that the Arab refugee problem is insoluble. Given among the Israelis the spirit of reconciliation reminiscent of Isaiah, and among the Arabs the spirit of forbearance reflected in the Muslim and Christians faiths, this problem can be resolved.

The Status of Jerusalem

With respect to the status of Jerusalem I can say that the existing situation occasions widespread concern among Christians everywhere. The city that in times past had been extolled as "Jerusalem the Golden" is not now a city of that kind. During my years of waiting to see Jerusalem I had not supposed that, when at last it would be given me to gaze upon the city where once my Lord was hailed with glad hosannas, I would see a city divided by barbed wire, and armed sentries who would escort me across a stretch of no man's land from Old Jerusalem to New Jerusalem.

In Old Jerusalem I sensed the tensions derived from the hatreds engendered by the Israeli-Arab war. I felt something of the mental and spiritual anguish endured by Jews in the knowledge that access to the Wailing Wall had been denied the sons and daughters of Israel. And in New Jerusalem I witnessed a military demonstration that continued for two hours, during which time there passed before my eyes all manner of military contingents, with marching soldiers and girls in army uniforms, standing alert beside guns mounted on giant tanks and battle wagons, while overhead I heard the throbbing engines of military aircraft zooming across the sky. As I saw these things I seemed to hear the ancient Hebrew prophet, Micah, saying:

“And they shall beat their swords into
plowshares and their spears into pruning
hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;

But they shall sit every man under his vine
and fig tree,
And none shall make them afraid.”

And I could hear my Lord saying: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the earth.”

I am not now discussing the wisdom or the unwisdom of military demonstrations in Jerusalem or anywhere else. Certainly Israel was doing on this occasion what many other nations were then and are now doing. What I am saying is that with an Iron Curtain between Old and New Jerusalem, with mutterings of hatred heard along the way where once the Prince of Peace had walked, and with military preparations going forward within and without the Holy City, a situation is created that cannot but concern Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Following his return from the Middle East, Secretary Dulles said: “Jerusalem is divided into armed camps split between Israel and the Arab nation of Jordan.

The atmosphere is heavy with hate. As I gazed on the Mount of Olives, I felt anew that Jerusalem is, above all, the holy place of the Christian, Moslem, and Jewish faiths. This has been repeatedly emphasized by the United Nations. This does not necessarily exclude some political status in Jerusalem for Israel and Jordan. But the world religious community has claims in Jerusalem which take precedence over the political claims of any particular nation."

The National Council of Churches supported the declaration of Mr. Dulles in which he underscored the stake of these three faiths in Jerusalem. In its letter of September 17, 1953, addressed to the U. S. delegation to the UN, the General Board of the National Council of Churches recalled that the United States, in the past, had supported the recommendation of the General Assembly for the internationalization of Jerusalem. It was the view of the National Council of Churches that "the great majority of the people of our churches would like to see this recommendation put into effect." The U. S. delegation to the UN was then urged to take steps looking toward renewed discussion of this question by the General Assembly.

Action in support of the internationalization of Jerusalem had been taken at an earlier date by such church bodies as the Executive Committee of the Federal Council of Churches, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the Near East Christian Council. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, instituted by the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, in a Memorandum submitted to the Lausanne meeting of the Palestine Conciliation Commission, affirmed the following:

"We do not presume to define the political mechanisms by which this international re-

sponsibility (related to the protection of Holy Places, religious buildings and sites in Palestine and free access thereto) shall be fulfilled.

"We do, however, express the strong conviction that artificial separation of historic religious sites from the community in which they are located — particularly in the Jerusalem area where such sites are numerous — would be an inadequate method of exercising international responsibility. Whatever plan is devised, it should reckon with the current life of the three faiths represented in the population as well as with the historic interest which a large part of the world professes. This will require, we believe, political arrangements wherein measures for the protection and world-wide use of the Holy Places are integrated with the guarantee of human rights and freedom for all inhabitants."

The substance of this Memorandum was endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. At about the same time the then five presidents of the World Council of Churches, (Dr. Marc Boegner, president of the Federation of Protestants; Dr. Erling Eidem, archbishop of Upsala; Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, archbishop of Canterbury; Dr. S. Germanos, archbishop of Thyaterira; and Dr. John R. Mott, U.S.A.) addressed a letter to the Patriarch of Jerusalem (April, 1948) which said in part:

"We desire that the land of our Lord's earthly ministry shall be a land where men can live in peace and quietness and where the status of the Holy Places shall be secured and access to them freely maintained.

"We desire to see the human rights and liberties of all men in Palestine guaranteed, and fully embodied in whatever settlement of provisions are eventually effective, and especially the right to worship God according to conscience, and to teach and preach the faith in which they believe."

I cite these actions to indicate how widespread is the concern of Christendom that some form of political arrangement respecting

Jerusalem shall be agreed to that will give form and substance to Secretary Dulles' affirmation that "the world religious community has claims in Jerusalem which take precedence over the political claims of any particular nation."

Responsibility of American Christians

If it is humanly possible to find a solution to the many problems at issue between Israel and the Arab States, it will be found in the spirit of a "sympathetic and impartial friendship" for all the peoples of the Middle East. Certain it is that vast numbers of Christians in this country would welcome a renewal of negotiations looking toward the achieving of a just and durable peace between the Israelis and the Arabs. The National Study Conference on the Churches and World Order, held in Cleveland, Ohio, in October 1953, at the call of the National Council of Churches, and attended by 380 delegates and 50 consultants drawn from 26 denominations, expressed the hope that the UN, firmly supported by the United States, would be able to find ways to ease tensions in the Middle East and to move from the present stalemate to permanent peace. "Every effort must be continued," it was said, "to find agreement by negotiation whether under the UN or by direct consultation by the governments immediately concerned."

But American Christians do not fully discharge the responsibilities laid upon them by the God of righteousness once they have called upon their government to use its good offices in the search for peace and justice in the Middle East. If it is right and proper that the United States shall re-examine its policy in the Middle East, and to do this in a spirit of "sympathetic and impartial friendship,"

and if it is right and proper for Christians, as they did at the Cleveland Conference, to petition the United Nations to bend every possible effort to achieve peace in this area, then it is also right and proper that Christians shall themselves undertake a re-examination of their own conclusions, and do this in the spirit of "sympathetic and impartial friendship."

I suggest, therefore, that serious consideration be given to the feasibility of convening, under interdenominational auspices, a consultation of American Christian leaders, on the problems related to peace and security in the Middle East, particularly as these problems have to do with Israeli-Arab tensions. Included in this consultation would be churchmen, both lay and clerical, who might be expected to set forth varying views on the issues under discussion. The purpose would be to consider the momentous events that have transpired since the partition of Palestine in 1947; and, in the light of these events, interpreted in the perspective of the Christian gospel, to reach, if possible, a consensus of minds respecting these crucial problems. The success of such a consultation would depend upon the degree to which the participants recognized that the guilt for the circumstances of unrest and violence in and around Palestine is a shared guilt; that not all of the right is on one side, nor all of the wrong on the other side.

It is of little use for Christians in the United States to call upon the leaders of their government, or for Christians elsewhere to petition the leaders of their respective governments, to lay aside the suspicions and ill will engendered by the clash of Israeli and Arab arms if they are not themselves prepared in their discussion of the Palestine question to manifest that spirit of Christian love and humility which is so essential to the healing of the nations.

Let us then, all of us, speak our minds with such persuasiveness as we can command, but let us do this in the knowledge that God's truth respecting a complex political situation cannot be fully and unerringly comprehended by mortals. Particularly is this true when the situation has to do with the restoration of peace and order in an area where the cross currents of nationalism, religious fervor, and world politics play upon human emotions with a fury than can scarcely be contained. Those Christians who support the religious and political presuppositions of Zionism, as well as those Christians who reject these presuppositions, can do no other than lift their prayers to Almighty God that law and order may be re-established in the Holy Land, and in the troubled areas contiguous thereto. In this mood of prayer let them engage in a concerted search for peace in that area which is sacred to the memory of Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

But this search will fail of its purpose if sole reliance is placed upon political, economic, and military measures. The tensions that have made of the Middle East a breeding ground of hatred and despair cannot permanently be resolved short of the healing influences engendered in men's hearts and minds by the living God. We may have come to one of those moments in history when opposing forces can be brought into reconciliation only by the redemptive power of love, a love not of men, but of God; a love which is capable of rising above all considerations of revenge and retaliation.

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